

About *The Booke of Common Praier Noted*

■ **Commentary by Colin Franklin** ■

■ **Binding, Collation, and Provenance** ■

■ **Notes on Music Printing by D.W. Krummel** ■

John Merbecke *The Booke of Common Praier Noted*

John Merbecke

The Booke of Common Praier Noted

London, 1550

The Booke of Common Praier Noted, printed by Richard Grafton in 1550 – one year after the publication of the first English Book of Common Prayer – signals the marvelous arrival of music in the Anglican Reformation service. The title may suggest church liturgy with an added crop of academic footnotes. Nothing of the kind, of course: “noted” means “set to music.” In his magisterial *History of English Cathedral Music* (1906), John Skelton Bumpus extolled *The Booke of Common Praier Noted*, an object of the greatest charm and rarity, as the very “foundation of our choral service.”

The events and forces that produced the Book of Common Prayer and its musical progeny unfolded gradually in the mid-sixteenth century. If any single act exemplifies the momentum of the long process of Reformation in England, it was Henry VIII’s decision in 1534 to overrule the Pope’s authority by disregarding his marriage vows to Catherine of Aragon in order to marry Anne Boleyn. From this tortuous process emerged the doctrine of royal, as opposed to papal, supremacy. Plunder of the monasteries, destruction of images, change of the lit-

urgy from Latin to English, and much else slowly followed in a Tudor mix of policy, greed, and creed. Over this period of Anglican identity crisis and over particular agonies concerning the nature of transubstantiation, real presence, and the Eucharist, Thomas Cranmer presided as Archbishop of Canterbury (from 1533 through the rest of Henry's reign and that of his son Edward VI [1547-53]). During those two decades and with Cranmer's compliance with Henry's appalling divorces and executions in the name of conscience, Roman doctrine and the Latin mass yielded to doctrinal change in the form of the "Articles" of religion: the English Bible was proclaimed for general use in 1539, and then the Book of Common Prayer after much debate and committee work among the bishops ten years later. Its publication defined the Anglican future.

It seems surprising, against that background, that the reformed church waited so long for its new liturgy. The monasteries had been outlawed ("dissolved" is the term generally used) nearly two decades earlier. For much of that time King and Church were more concerned with the redistribution and use of monastic wealth than with the alteration to forms of service throughout the land. The translation of the liturgy from Latin and the creation the Book of Common Prayer was a great scholarly responsibility, and its first iteration did not appear until 1549, two years after Henry VIII's death.

In 1549 and thereafter the purpose of the new prayer book was simplicity, ease of use, and comprehension. The arrangement was rational. Formerly, even to find one's way around church service books caused problems: "to turne the boke onlye, was so hard and intricate a matter, that many times, there was more business to fynd out what should be read,

than to read it when it was founde out."¹ Moreover, the various "uses" in different parts of the land had become a nuisance, "some folowyng Salsbury use, some Herford use, some the use of Bangor, some of Yorke, & some of Lincolne: Now from hencefurth, all the whole realme shall have but one use."² The "one use" followed was the text of Salisbury (or Sarum, as it had been called) in the familiar structure of the old Roman Catholic "Hours."

Music followed soon after 1549 and was probably in preparation concurrently, as the new, friendly, understandable liturgy must have seemed a dull affair with no singing. The musical setting was entrusted to the Master of the Choristers of the Royal Chapel at Windsor, John Merbecke. Merbecke's life was an adventure story. In 1544 he was condemned to death at the stake along with three others for "heretical adherence to Calvinism," but was saved by the intervention of the Bishop of Winchester because of his considerable music talents (the other three were executed). He continued to study theology and music into his later years, and apart from *The Booke of Common Praier Noted*, wrote a five-part mass and several Latin motets. He lived until about 1585, "singing merrily and playing on the organs."

Merbecke's *Booke of Common Praier Noted* is a relatively slender volume because no music was required for the readings from the gospels and epistles; and since a psalm was chanted on one note there was no need to print more than a brief music specimen. In Merbecke's musical setting, the Roman Catholic Hours – originally divided into Matins, Lauds,

1. Preface to the 1549 Book of Common Prayer.

2. Ibid.

Prime, Tierce, Sext, Nones, Vespers, and Compline – were reduced to Matins and Evensong, which included alternative settings of the “Magnificat” and “Te Deum,” followed by the communion service and “At the buriall of the dead.” In the style of old plainsong, *The Booke of Common Praier Noted* was written so that each chanted syllable had its own note and was thus easily understood. Soon after Merbecke wrote the setting of the prayers in plainsong in 1550, composers such as Thomas Tallis and William Byrd began to harmonize his plain-song and to produce their own polyphonic versions.

During the five years of Mary Tudor’s reign, which began three years after Merbecke’s prayer book was printed, England returned to the old authority of the Roman Catholic Church. After Mary’s death in 1559, Queen Elizabeth declared her preferences with regard to church music “that there be a modest distinct songue, so used in all parts of the common prayers in the Church, that the same may be playnely understood, as yf it were read without syngyng.” Merbecke’s method accorded perfectly with her wishes. Had *The Booke of Common Praier Noted* been delayed by nine years, it would have found royal approval and probably wider appeal; however, the timing of its publication was such that a second printing was never required.

Of unusual interest is the key to the notation, a curious explanation that follows the title page. That such a key was needed is evidence that music printing had not yet settled into a common convention that all users would recognize, and that the service in English was intended for a wider understanding among congregations who had formerly left Latin observance to the clergy. The conventions of Merbecke’s

plainsong as printed by Grafton required four signs, and a dot, and he demonstrated them. It is an intriguing page, nicely laid out, perfectly expressing a moment in the history of English music.

Merbecke’s work is far from being the first sustained example of music printing in England – in Robert Steele’s bibliography³ it ranks seventeenth (later bibliographies add a few more before Merbecke), nor is it the most refined example of music printing. The metal music type in Thomas Pynson’s *Sarum Missal* of 1520 displays more precision, and the open-diamond notes of Crowley’s *Psalter* of 1549 are more elegant than Grafton’s music printing. But the plain honesty of Merbecke’s *Booke of Common Praier Noted* is itself a form of art. The method, as in most music printing at that time, was to make blocks for the staves and print them with the rubrics in an orange-red. Then came, in reasonably good register, the words (including the quite elaborate initials); the notes were printed in black as a second printing. Grafton’s square notes (his semi-breves) are strongly irregular and may have been cut in wood, not cast in metal. Grafton used the same types and style in his printing of the litany for Cranmer five years earlier. Steele called his music type “evidently home-made.”

The paper for the *The Booke of Common Praier Noted* is good enough to have survived four and a half centuries without blemish. William Pickering’s facsimile of 1844, printed by Charles Whittingham, is a work of some distinction, but it made no attempt to imitate the several splendid large initials which open the book’s main divisions, or the many smaller initials. Strong red staves and cast-metal notes look well at some

3. *The Earliest Music Printing in England*, printed for the Bibliographical Society, 1903.

distance from the Tudor book. Later facsimiles, such as those listed in the 1980 edition by Sutton Courtenay Press, do more justice to the original. *The Booke of Common Praier Noted* may be remembered as “the foundation of our choral service,” but was “probably designed,” according to Grove’s *Dictionary of Music*, “for use in parish cathedrals,” a purpose for which Grafton’s music printing and style were perfectly appropriate.

Bridwell Library’s copy of *The Booke of Common Praier Noted* is of particular interest in having bound into the back two short publications, which continue the long story of the Church of England. The first, *Articles whereupon it was agreed by the Archbishops and Bishops of both Prouinces and the whole Cleargie, in the Conuocation Holden at London in the Yeere of our Lorde God 1562* (London: Christopher Barker, 1579), is a later printing of the final form of the Thirty-Nine Articles, which grew and shrank and grew again by degrees from the original Ten Articles published in 1536. This version was sanctioned by Queen Elizabeth and published in both Latin and English. From that time to the present, at least acknowledgment of these Articles has been a requirement of the Anglican clergy.

The second, *A Booke of Certaine Canons Concernyng some Parte of the Discipline of the Churche of England* (London: John Daye, 1571), is the first edition of one of the several failed attempts to codify and legislate ecclesiastical law within the Church of England. In the absence of papal authority, questions of procedure, administration, and law had to be dealt with in some agreed-upon way. This included such matters as the administration of the sacraments, the duties and behavior of clerics, approved types of furniture, and the care of

churches. The 1571 work marks a significant step in the development of church polity. Efforts to draft such a code continued, however, until the first decade of the seventeenth century with the adoption of canons drawn up by Richard Bancroft in 1604. These “Canons of 1604” (officially adopted in 1606) remain the basis of ecclesiastical governance in the Church of England.

Colin Franklin

Colin Franklin, after graduating from Oxford, became a publisher with Routledge & Kegan Paul and left after twenty years to be an independent bookseller and writer from his home in Oxfordshire. He is the author of several books published by Scholar Press, including *The Private Presses* (1990), *Shakespeare Domesticated: The Eighteenth-Century Editors* (1991), *Lord Chesterfield: His Character and the Characters* (1993), and *Book Collecting as One of the Fine Arts* (1996).

Binding

The binding of *The Booke of Common Praier Noted* is red goatskin over pasteboard measuring 7 1/2 x 5 1/2 inches (193 x 141 mm). Both the front and back boards have double gilt rules forming the outer borders. The central panel is shaped with double rules enclosing continuous gilt ornaments made with a roll tool. The outer panel is formed with gilt triple rules and has triangular ornaments in the center of each side; gilt ornaments are placed on the outside corners and have double rules extending to the center panel. The spine has raised bands and is divided into six panels with titling in the second panel; the other spine panels are gold tooled with saltires and small ornaments.

[View Binding](#)

John Merbecke *The Booke of Common Praier Noted*

Collation: 4⁰: A², B-R⁴, S² [signed \$3 (-E2) B2 missigned as A2, L3 missigned as L2], 68 leaves

Contents: A1^a: title page. A1^b: blank. A2^a: *introduction/dedication*. A2^b: blank. B1^a-D4^b: 'Mattins.' E1^a-I4^a: 'Euensong.' I4^b-Q1^b: 'At the communion.' Q2^a-R4^a: 'At the buriall.' R4^b-S2^a: 'At the communion when there is a buriall.' S2^b: colophon.

Title: *Articles whereupon it was agreed by the Archbishops...*
London, 1579

Collation: 4⁰: A-C⁴, D² [signed \$3], 14 leaves

Contents: A1^a: engraved title page. A1^b: blank. A2^a-D1^a: text. D1^b-D2^a: 'The Table'. D2^b: tail piece.

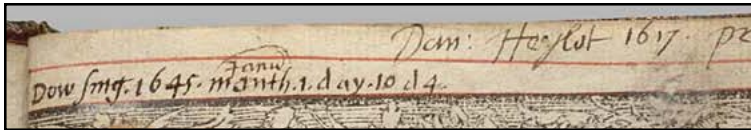
Title: *A Booke of Certaine Canons...*
London, 1571

Collation: 4⁰: A-C⁴, D⁴ (-D4) [signed \$4], 15 leaves, pp. [2] 3-20
21 22-28 29 30 [=30]

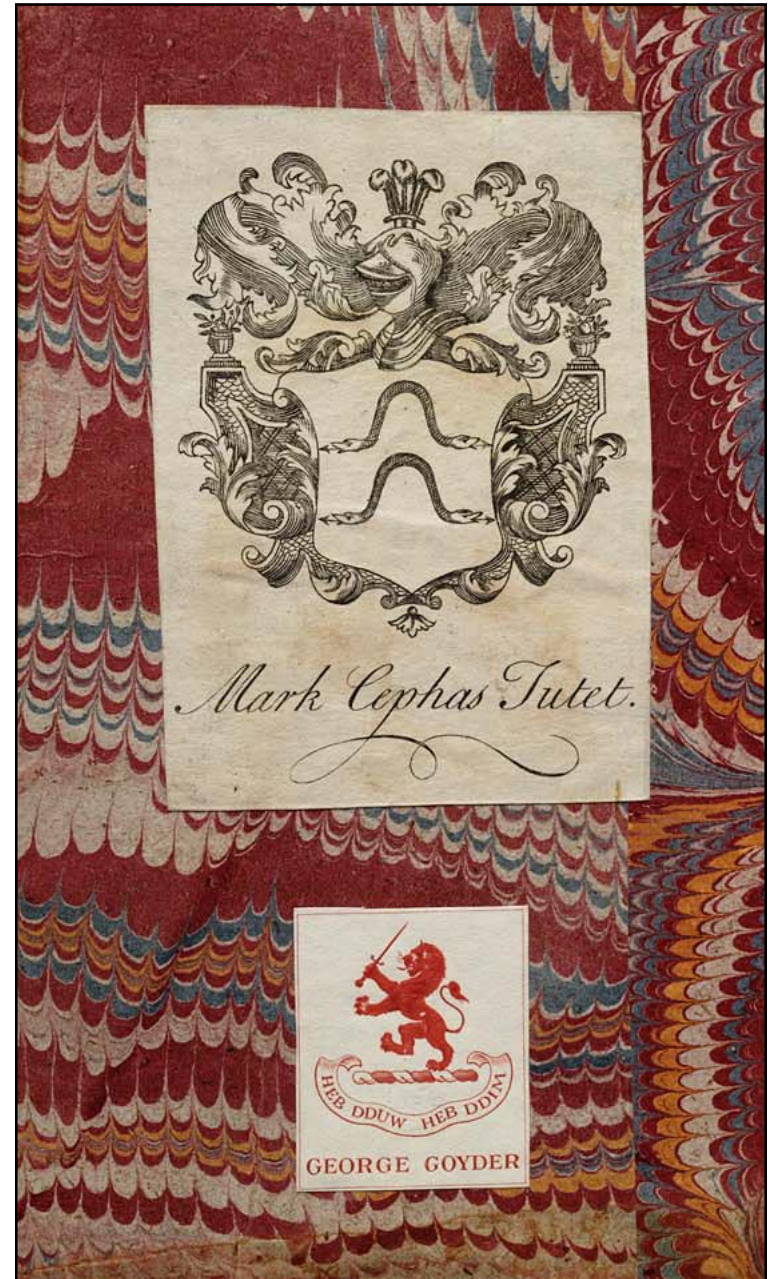
Contents: A1^a: title. A1^b: contents list. A2^a-D3^b: text.

Provenance

The earliest recorded owner of this copy of *The Booke of Common Praier Noted* is Daniel Heylot, who wrote his name on the title page in 1617. Nothing appears to be known of him. All too much is recorded of the book's next owner William Dowsing (1596-1679?) – or rather, of his iconoclastic exploits. To find his notorious signature here and still better, the date of 1645, seems almost too piquant to be true. To brandish a copy of the



Book of Common Prayer in the 1640s was to make a complex style-statement. (Judith Maltby has recently devoted 300 pages to every nuance in *Prayer Book and People in Elizabethan and early Stuart England* [Cambridge University Press, 1998].) That the Book of Common Prayer was the product of Protestants martyred under Queen Mary did not necessarily endear it to “the godly” of a later generation. Their reactions varied according to their perception of its relation to authority, whether of secular government, parish priest, episcopacy, or Papacy. As many as 3,000 soldiers in the Parliamentary army were using the Book of Common Prayer as late as 1647. Yet at the same time parishioners were making formal complaints against “scandalous ministers” for using a prayer book that was written (they claimed) by the “imps of hell and stank in the nostrails of God.” The Christmas service attended by the diarist John Evelyn in 1657 was raided by parliamentary



troops, who informed him that the “Common Prayers...was but the Masse in English.”

Ideology and doctrine, however, are terms too grave to associate with William Dowsing. He was a rogue elephant in a china-shop, a street hooligan before his time. To a man of his inclinations, submitting complaints to the Committee for Scandalous Ministers was too indirect a course of action, and disrupting Sunday services too ephemeral an achievement. He preferred to smash unoccupied churches. Fortunately, Parliament had passed an ordinance in August 1643 directing the removal from churches ecclesiastical fittings remaining from the Roman Catholic era of British church history: stone altars, the rails around them, candlesticks, and any images of saints, members of the Holy Trinity, or the Blessed Virgin Mary. Dowsing soon obtained a roving commission for Cambridgeshire in 1643, and for his native Suffolk in 1644. “Have hammer, will travel” might have been his motto. The diaries he kept on his altar-stripping tours have survived to dismay and at times enchant posterity with their self-righteous joie-de-vivre. A William Dowsing Society was invented three centuries later, in the midst of another war, to satirize the religious innovations of the Cambridge college chapels. In *Babylon Bruis'd & Mount Moriah Mended* (1940), Frederick Brittain and Bernard Manning adopted the style of the Society of St. Peter & Paul, gleefully reporting the destruction of such trendy church fittings as the Revised Version of the Bible, *The Oxford Psalter*, and *Songs of Praise*. The original Dowsing, however, never mentions books, whether seized, destroyed, or preserved, perhaps because they were such small game compared to the cherubim, the “superstitious pictures” and “idolatrous inscriptions” that form the staple of his itineraries. The cir-

cumstances surrounding his (if it is his) possession of *The Booke of Common Praier Noted* must therefore remain a mystery.

By the time Merbecke’s book reached the library of its next recorded owner, it was no longer a focus of religious controversy but an antiquarian relic for the bibliographer. Mark Cephast Tutet (1732-85) was a Huguenot merchant and minor antiquary, a collector not only of books but also of coins, medals, and prints. “Few of his survivors,” wrote the printer John Nichols, “understood better the rare secret of collecting only what was truly valuable.... His small but valuable library was remarkable for the neatness of the copies, and many of the books were improved by notes written in his own small but elegant handwriting.” Although he corresponded on scholarly subjects with a small circle of like-minded friends, Tutet published almost nothing apart from a bibliography on which he collaborated with his fellow Huguenot the Lambeth librarian Andrew Coltee Ducarel, *A List of the Various Editions of the Bible...in English, from the Year 1526 to 1776*, issued in 1778 in an edition of 250 copies. His library – “that remarkable collection of early printing, bibliography, and a few choice manuscripts” as A.N.L. Munby described it – was sold at auction after his death from January 11 to February 18, 1786. Purchasers included the antiquaries Richard Gough, Francis Douce, and George Mason.

Of the book’s later owners, only the last has left his mark. He was George Armin Goyder (1908-97), chief executive of the giant newsprint company British International Paper, and author of several books on the application of Christian principles to the reform of company law and modern business, as well as (one might even say) the application of enlightened business principles to the reform of religion. Goyder took great interest

in church government, serving as a member of the (Anglican) Church Assembly for twenty-seven years; he resigned in 1964 to promote the scheme of synodical government advocated in his *The People's Church* (1966). His fine library, devoted to the history of the Reformation, the theory of usury, and the concept of Natural law, inevitably was not complete without a copy of so significant an edition as Merbecke's *Booke of Common Praier Noted*. Bridwell Library bought Goyder's copy when he sold his library at Christie's (London) in June 1988.

Notes on Music Printing

Printing music is more problematical than printing words. Fewer symbols are used, but they need to be seen on staff lines and at the right height. Early printers often simply gave up; in their 1457 psalter, Fust and Schoeffer left space for handwritten notes and staves. Other early printers did either and left the other to be added by hand. Later efforts display inventiveness and diligence but rarely graphic elegance or even musical legibility. Movable music type for printing in a single press run was rare before 1530.

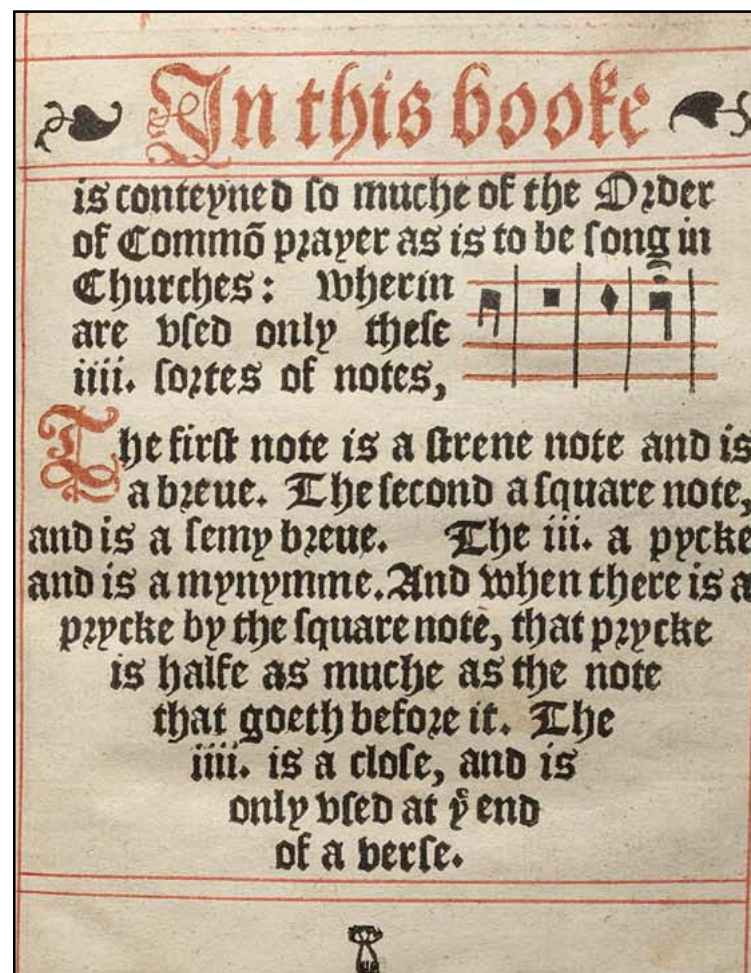
Multiple-impression printing – one press run for the lines, another for the notes – is seen in many of the landmarks of early music printing, and typically to handsome effect. First to come to mind is always the magnificent work of Ottaviano dei Petrucci, whose *Harmonice Musices Odhecaton* (Venice, 1501) also marks the beginning of music publishing. Later music books tell of printers out to do splendid work: notable examples include Petrus Tritonius' *Melopoeiae* (Augsburg: Erhard Oeglin, 1507); several large, handsome collections of religious art music by Elzéar Genet of Carpentras (Avignon: Jean de Channey, 1530s); and the 1530 *Book of XX. Songs*, by an unnamed London printer working "at the sign of the Black Morens."

Liturgical music books, like *The Booke of Common Praier Noted*, also called on double-impression printing, but for another reason. As in most liturgical music manuscripts, the black notes need to appear on red lines. The lines could be either long segments of rule, or short pieces of type. (The former

is seen mostly in this book, the latter several times.) The notes themselves are of traditional Gregorian chant (plainsong, plainchant), with square note heads and mostly without stems. Occasionally the notes are elegantly formed but often they are clumsy, sometimes merely inverted type sorts.

Two different systems of musical notation were common in 1550, as through most of modern history. Liturgical notation calls for flexible rhythm so as to reflect the sounds of the words, in contrast to mensural notation, fixed in its rhythmic beat and with diamond-shaped notes, usually white and with stems. (After 1700, as music typography came to be superseded by engraving and lithography, the diamond notes became the round forms we know today; this was, simply, because they were easier to draw). Our book marks a turning point, subtle and cautious, in political and religious history but also in the history of church music and its notation. Merbecke uses liturgical notation, but his title page also specifies fixed rhythm: a diamond note (pique) is half a square one (semi-breve), two square notes equal one diagonally hooked one (breve), a dot (prick) adds half the value of the note it precedes, and a long close comes at the end. Merbecke's music is still monophonic (one line at a time); black forms served his needs; they were in fact what the literate clergy in 1550 would have known.

Mensural notation, with a fixed beat, necessary in polyphony (several different simultaneous voices, and in need of coordination) is based in white diamond-shaped notes with stems, as were the Calvinist psalms of Sternhold and Hopkins, which the Marian exiles brought back from the Continent and which would dominate the rest of the Tudor and all of the



Stuart era. The square liturgical forms in this book, in other words, tell us that Merbecke's musical allegiances were still to Rome. His is a high church; and the two titles bound in with this copy remind us that his liturgical music ideals, innovative in 1550 but soon suppressed, would be revived and remembered several decades later in spite of the low church ascendancy of the Sternhold and Hopkins metrical psalms.

Most early music books are well printed: the printers may have been musically illiterate, but someone always made sure the music was correct. *The Booke of Common Praier Noted* is of special interest in the history of music printing because its presswork is a rare exception. In gathering K, the notes have shifted in some copies. The two press runs for each sheet are mis-aligned by barely a millimeter, but this means that their notes are lower or higher by nearly one step. J. Eric Hunt, in *Cranmer's First Litany and the Book of Common Prayer Noted* (London: SPCK, 1939), shows on pages 60-63 the difference between the copies in the British Museum (faulty) and in Archbishop Marsh's Library in Dublin (correct). Happily, none of the modern editions have used the faulty text. Nor do any of the modern reprints and quasi-facsimile editions of this book get the notes wrong, beginning with those issued by William Pickering in 1844 and Edwin F. Rimbault in 1845. These are listed by Robin A. Leaver in his *Courtenay Facsimile no. 3* (Oxford: Sutton Courtenay Press, 1980), along with a record of the extant copies and valuable commentary on the musical text and its printing.

D.W. Krummel

D.W. Krummel has been Professor of Library Science and of Music at the University of Illinois in Urbana. His books include *English Music Printing, 1553-1700* (London: Bibliographical Society, 1975), the Grove/Norton handbook, *Music Printing and Publishing* (1990), and *The Literature of Music Bibliography* (Berkeley: Fallen Leaf Press, 1993).



John Merbecke. *The Booke of Common Praier Noted*. London, 1550. BRIDWELL LIBRARY

Octavo™

359

Dom: Heylot 1617. pzet
Dow smg. 1645. ^{Janu} month. 1. day. 10 d. 4.



The booke
of Common
praier noted.

E

1550.

